

WINSTED POST OFFICE  
328 Main Street (U.S. Route 44)  
Winsted  
Litchfield County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-428

HABS  
CONN,  
3-WIN,  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE WINSTED POST OFFICE HABS No. CT - 428

Location: 328 Main Street (U.S. Route 44)  
Litchfield County  
Winsted, Connecticut 06098  
  
(USGS Winsted Quadrangle, Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
Z18 E660089 N4642629)

Present Owner: United States Postal Service

Present Occupant: United States Postal Service

Significance: The Winsted Post Office is an example of  
1930's government/institutional type building  
in the tradition of Colonial American Revival  
Architecture. The building employs a typical  
post office floor plan, with center entrance,  
off-set 'L' shaped lobby, corner Postmaster's  
office, and workroom across the rear.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to the granite corner stone set in the base of the building, the building was constructed in 1936. Also, according to the book "Winsted and the Town of Winchester" by Frank H. DeMars and Elliot P. Bronson, the Winsted Post Office had an official dedication ceremony on May 15, 1937.
2. Architect: The supervising architect listed on the granite corner stone of the building is Louis A. Simon. The architect for the 1965 building addition was Andrew C. Rossetti, AIA, of Bristol, Connecticut.
3. Original and subsequent Owners: The Town Clerk's office in Winsted lists the original owner of The Winsted Post Office property as being Thomas Finn, James Finn, George Finn and Edward Finn. The Finn family sold the property to the United States Postal Service on March 18, 1936. This land deed is recorded in the Winsted Town Clerk's office book Volume 77, page 482.
4. Builder, supplies:
  - a. Builder - Information Unknown
  - b. Supplier - Information Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: The original plans for the 1936 building structure have not been located. The blueprints to the 1965 building addition were located in the basement of The Winsted Post Office.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1965, the United States Postal Service made plans to use The Winsted Post Office as a regional mail distribution center, responsible for handling the mail for the north-western towns of Connecticut. Thus, it was decided in 1965 to build a 66'-0" wide x 85'-0" long building addition off the rear of the existing post office. After the building addition was completed, the United States Postal Service decided against using The Winsted Post Office as the regional distribution center.

B. Historical Context:

Until the year 1927 the Town of Winsted was serviced by two (2) small post offices called substations. Substation 'A' was located in the west side of town and substation 'B' was located in the east side of town.

In 1927 the United States Postal Service contracted to build one (1) new post office in Winsted, and thus closed the two (2) existing substations. A significant debate and protest amongst the local residents occurred over the exact location of the new post office. Many of the local residents were interested to see that the new post office would be located in close proximity to their own homes. After much local debate a site was selected and in 1927 a new United States Post office was built at 380 Main Street. It was said, that many local residents were never fully satisfied with the new post office. Some residents felt the new building was rather small, visually unattractive and most of all, the building did not have a "significant stature" within the community that the residents wanted. The Post Office at 380 Main Street operated for ten years, until its closing in 1936.

In 1936 the United States Postal Service closed the Post Office at 380 Main Street and built a new facility at 328 Main Street. The Winsted Post Office has been operating since its opening in 1936 and has served all the residents of Winsted.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Considering the fact that The Winsted Post Office was built during the Great American Depression in which the U.S. economy was near collapse, the construction of the post office represented a significant local statement reflecting the use of quality building materials and craftsmanship.

The Winsted Post Office is an example of 1930 government/institutional type building in the tradition of colonial American revival architecture. The building elevations are rather elegantly refined in the use of applied ornamentation; and yet in contrast, the volume, size and scale of the building is large. One should note from the enclosed pictures, the elegant symmetry of the front elevation. The architect contrasts this refined building elevation with such elements as the splayed front entry stairs which are rather grand in

scale. Other grand scale elements the architect employs in the building can be noted in the lofty service lobby ceiling which is approximately 16'-0" above the finished floor. There are also two (2) coffer-like vaulted arches which span across the lobby space.

One should also note the rather large windows which measure 8'-0" tall by 4'-0" wide. The architect celebrates the lobby space with his use of marble wainscot walls and a grand mural painting on the west interior wall. This contrast of details and simple form make the Winsted Post Office a unique and locally important statement of architecture.

2. Condition of Fabric: The entire building structure is in excellent condition. The lack of excessive ornamentation and detailing inherently add to the somewhat maintenance free quality of the building. The slate pitch roof is in excellent condition as well as the wood cupola and wood trim work. A new single ply EPDM roof membrane and insulation was installed on the flat roof in 1988. The interior lobby with its terrazzo floor and marble wainscot walls are all durable materials which are in excellent condition.

E. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The overall building structure is 66'-0" wide x 162'-0" long. The original structure built in 1936 was 66'-0" wide x 77'-0" long, and was built with one portion having a basement and one portion having a crawl space. The 1965 building was added to the back of the existing building and measured 66'-0" wide x 77'-0" long (see attached floor plan). The 1965 building addition was constructed with a full basement. The building also had a loading dock platform attached at the rear of the building.
2. Foundations: Poured concrete. The front elevation and a portion of the side elevation have a granite veneer base with a marble belt course (see enclosed pictures).
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls are 1'-0" thick which consists of 4" face brick with 6" thick concrete block back-up. The face brick is red brick with a common bond. Interior walls vary from painted concrete block to plaster to marble or brick.

4. Structural system, framing: The basement floor is a 5" thick concrete slab. The first floor is a concrete floor supported on poured-in-place concrete beams and columns. The flat roof is constructed of long span open web steel joists supported on the exterior masonry walls. The 1936 gabled roof structure is constructed of steel trusses.
5. Loading docks: A small loading dock existed off the back of the 1936 building structure. When the 1965 building addition was constructed, a loading dock 66'-0" wide x 25'-0" long off the rear of the building was added. This probably reflects a change to larger delivery trucks, and mid-size trucks which bring mail to and from the post office.
6. Chimney: The chimney is located at the rear of the original structure. The 1965 building addition has been built around it. The chimney is of simple, purely functional design and contributes no architectural interest to the building. It is visible only from the rear and east side of the building.
7. Openings (exterior):
  - a. Doorways and doors: The most notable doorway to the building is the front entry. The front doorway has wood doric columns placed at each side of the door entry. Above the doorway is a gold eagle, perched above a wood cornice and set into an arched window transom. The original front doors have been replaced with aluminum frame and glass entry doors. The original doors were wood.
  - b. Windows and Shutters: Windows are single pane glass with true wood mullion dividers. Window sizes are approximately 4'-0" wide x 8'-0" high. No shutters exist on the building.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape: The front portion of the 1936 structure has a slate covered gable roof. The back portion of the 1936 structure had a flat roof with skylights which brought natural light into the work area. The skylights were removed when the 1965 building structure was added. The flat roof of the building received a new single ply roof membrane and insulation in 1988.

- b. Cornice, eaves: A wood cornice molding continues horizontally around the entire building at a height of 17'-8" above the finished floor. The interior lobby has a wood cornice molding which runs along the perimeter of the space at approximately 15'-0" above finished floor.
- c. Cupola: The building has a wood cupola placed symmetrically on center at the top of the slate roof (see attached photo). The cupola is approximately 12'-0" tall and has wood cornice molding around its top. The roof is covered with copper which has since oxidized and turned greenish in color.

C. Description of interior:

- 1. Floor plan: The original 1936 building employed a typical Post Office floor plan, with a center entrance, offset 'L' shaped lobby, corner postmasters office, and workroom across the rear. In 1965 the workroom was doubled in size, a wider platform was added, and new carriers' areas were built in the original portion of the building. A new extension of the box lobby replaced an area that was a box lobby prior to 1965. Storage and mechanical spaces are located in the basement.
- 2. Stairways: There are a total of four (4) stairways at The Winsted Post Office. One stairway is an interior stairway to the basement and three stairways are exterior stairways.

First, the front public stairway to the building is constructed of cast-in-place concrete steps which are finished with granite stone. The stair splays out from top to bottom. The handrails are metal spindles which are grouted into the granite step. At the bottom of the steps, there is a lamp post on each side of the stair.

One exterior stair is located on the west side of the building. This stairway leads from grade down to the basement. It is constructed of poured-in-place concrete with metal hand rails. This stairway was constructed in 1935.

One exterior stair is located on the east side of the building. This stairway leads from grade down to the basement. It is constructed of poured-in-place concrete and has metal hand rails. This stairway was constructed in 1965.

The interior stairway is located on the east side of the building. This stairway connects to the basement level, and is constructed of poured-in-place concrete with metal hand railings. This stairway was constructed in 1965.

It should be noted that one (1) stairway which was part of the 1936 building structure was removed as part of the 1965 building addition. This stair was located just east of the men's toilet room and it connected to the basement.

3. Flooring: The lobby floor is finished with two-tone green and white diamond shaped patterned terrazzo. The perimeter of the lobby floor is finished with a 12" wide band of black terrazzo. The workroom floor is finished with 12" x 14" asphalt plank flooring. Bathrooms are finished with ceramic tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The lobby walls are finished with a 4'-0" high marble veneer wainscot and the remaining top half of the walls are plaster finish and painted.

The lobby ceiling which is approximately 15'-0" above the finished floor has a plaster finish. There are two (2) marble pilaster in the lobby in which coffered vaults arch from.

The walls in the work area are concrete block with a brick wainscotting to a height of 4'-7" above finished floor. The work area ceiling is finished with a 2'x 4' acoustic ceiling tile.

The bathroom walls are finished with glazed ceramic tile.

5. Openings:
  - a. Interior doorways and doors: The door type that was typically used in the 1936 building structure was a stile and rail wood door. The doors used in the 1965 building addition were metal doors. The doors used at the loading dock area were double acting, heavy duty swing doors.



- b. Windows (interior): None.
  - 6. Decorative Features and Trim: As noted above the painted mural on the west wall of the lobby depicts the town folks' disagreement as to where the 1927 post office would be built. The mural was painted by Mrs. Amy Jones of Saranac Lake, New York, in 1936.
  - 7. Hardware: Typical cylindrical passage locksets.
  - 8. Mechanical Equipment:
    - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Perimeter hot water fin tube radiation heat; hot water unit heaters in the mailing vestibule which is adjacent to the loading docks. One main oil-fired boiler, feeding an air handling unit with a supply and return ducts which is located in the basement.
    - b. Lighting: 1' x 4' fluorescent tube lighting recessed in the acoustic ceiling tile.
    - c. Plumbing: Typical modern plumbing with hot and cold water, flush valve water closets and urinals.
  - 9. Original furnishings: None.
- D. Site:
- 1. General setting and orientation: The Winsted Post Office is oriented to the south. Across the road from The Winsted Post Office is the Mad River which runs parallel to Main Street in the west to east direction. Next door to The Winsted Post Office is the Town Hall building which is a Victorian structure dating back to the late 19th century. The Winsted Post Office is located in the central business district of Winsted in which most of the structures are Victorian style dating to the late 19th century. Other common buildings are churches in the Richardsonian/Romanesque revival style.
  - 2. Historic Landscape Design: There is a small planting bed area in the front of The Winsted Post Office. There is a tall maple tree planted at each corner of the building and there are various spreading yews planted throughout.
- It should be noted that the original building had laurel blossoms planted in the planting beds. Winsted is known as the laurel city and in 1936 when the building was completed laurel blossoms were donated for

the building by the Laurel City Historical Society. These facts are so noted in the book "Winsted and The Town of Winchester" which can be located at the Beardsley & Memorial Public Library in Winsted, Connecticut.

#### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: Drawings for the 1936 building structure were not located. Drawings for the 1965 building addition are located in the Winsted Post Office basement.
- B. Historic View: Photographs are available from the United States Postal Service, Support Services Division located at 141 Weston Street in Hartford, Connecticut.
- C. Interviews: None.
- D. Bibliography:
  - 1. Primary and Unpublished Sources: Town Clerks Office, land record deed page 482 Vol. 77, Finn property sold to the United States of America.
  - 2. Secondary and Published Sources: Book - "Winsted and The Town of Winchester" by Frank H. DeMars and Elliot P. Bronson. This book can be located at the Beardsley & Memorial Public Library in Winsted, Connecticut.
- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: U.S. Postal Archives.
- F. Supplemental Material: Small scale drawings of the original Winsted Post Office are available at the United States Postal Service, Support Services Division located at 141 Weston Street, Hartford, Connecticut and complete drawings are available from the Real Estate & Building Department at the United States Postal Service located at 141 Weston Street in Hartford, Connecticut.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The alterations planned for The Winsted Post Office consist of the installation of a concrete ramp at the front entry to the building. Also, as a result of a Federal Appellate Court decision, Rose v. Postal Service, the Postal Service was requested to make all buildings leased after January 1, 1977 to be accessible to handicapped persons.

The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 requires that certain Federal Buildings be accessible to handicapped persons. A court decision, which became final in 1986 is the basic of the Nationwide Postal Service Barrier Compliance Program.

Also, it should be noted that a specific complaint was filed by a customer of The Winsted Post Office which cited the inaccessibility of the building by handicapped customers.

This project has been coordinated by Dawn Batayte of the United States Postal Service, Support Services Division, 141 Weston Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06101-9991

The United States Postal Service has obtained the architectural services of Design Collaborative Architects P.C. in May 1988 of Bridgeport, Connecticut to prepare construction drawings for the new handicapped ramp.

Prepared By: Richard Rapice  
Title: Architect  
Affiliation: Design Collaborative  
Architects P.C.

